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Displacement in Frank Norris's McTeague

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“WHAT SHALL WE USE TO FILL THE EMPTY SPACES?”:

DISPLACEMENT IN FRANK NORRIS’S *MCTEAGUE*

by

JENNIFER LAMBETH

(Under the Direction of Olivia Carr Edenfield)

ABSTRACT

McTeague, Frank Norris's Naturalistic text written in 1899, depicts the corruption of a California couple due to influences outside of their control. In positioning Trina McTeague as a woman unable to identify with either of the two major feminine ideologies of the day, the Angel in the House and the New Woman, this paper examines her identity as conflicted because of this lack of autonomy. Her failure to identify herself leads to a mental break that is reflected in the domestic spaces she inhabits. The places she lives each become smaller and dirtier reflecting her diminished mental capacity. All the while, Trina works to fill her trunk, a substitute domestic space, with coins in an attempt to build value for herself the only way she knows how: monetarily. This paper analyzes the feminine ideologies at the turn of the twentieth century focusing on the concept of identity and how it links to the domestic space.

INDEX WORDS: Frank Norris, *McTeague*, Trina, Domestic Space, Home, House, Domesticity, Angel in the House, New Woman, Gender, Identity, Trunk

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JENNIFER LAMBETH

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MASTER OF ARTS

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Major Professor: Olivia Carr Edenfield
Committee: Candy B. K. Schille
Caren Town

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DEDICATION

To Lyndsey, you are the person who understands the most about what it took to successfully complete this project. You have been my copy editor, conference buddy, and, most importantly, my closest friend through this whirlwind journey.

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CRITICAL RECEPTION AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Mr. Frank Norris has been blamed and will unquestionably be blamed again and again for choosing the theme of McTeague; but it is only just to him to say that he has handled his material fearlessly; that he has steadfastly followed out his premises to the end.

*John D. Barry, "New York Letter"
March 18, 1899*

In Frank Norris's *McTeague* (1899), Trina McTeague's thriftiness transforms into an obsessive urge to hoard money, which is a symptom of her inability to identify with a feminine ideal, either the Angel in the House or the New Woman. Her failure of identification forces her to find value outside of herself, leading to her obsession-turned-fetishistic relationship with money. Unable to define herself, Trina suffers a psychological break resulting in her compulsive hoarding of money. Trina begins to fill her trunk with gold coins, which are carefully hidden underneath her wedding dress. Her trunk that houses these precious items serves as a physical marker for a transitional time in her life and is significant of the shift between her unmarried and married life. Her belongings fill the trunk and are brought to her on the day she weds McTeague and her family moves away. The coins she hides in the trunk give her a tangible value because of her failure to identify with or find personal worth through her own self or through her marriage to McTeague. Trina's relationships, as well as her sanity, deteriorate. She is disfigured and ultimately murdered by McTeague, a character who inflicts pain upon most characters in Norris's text.

The fictional residents of Polk Street are depicted in an environment ripe with social conditions that shape them into caricature-like manifestations of their desires and

longings. Whether considering McTeague, the animalistic brute who pulls teeth with his bare hands, or Trina, the child-like daughter of a lower-class immigrant family, the characters Norris creates are victims of their social environment. The characters in Norris's *McTeague* reveal his interest in the animalistic urges that surface when people are pushed beyond what they can physically or mentally handle. Trina exhibits a thriftiness that turns into extreme miserliness. Her attitude toward money leads Trina and her husband to live like animals in a filthy den. Her husband McTeague, a brawny, dim-witted dentist, is a harmless creature whose desires are awakened after he meets Trina and his life becomes more complicated and disturbed by change. After a brief courtship and marriage, the two suffer both major losses and significant gain in their lives. Trina wins the lottery that provides the couple with five thousand dollars. Shortly after the couple is married, McTeague loses his dental practice because he is reported for not having a dental license. These two events start a downward spiral that results in the brutal death of Trina and the complete isolation of McTeague in Death Valley, handcuffed to a dead man.

The Naturalistic text tells the story of a couple who live on Polk Street in San Francisco. When the California Gold Rush was in full swing and adventure stories were written to draw people out West, *McTeague* tells the story of an anti-hero whose life transforms from monotonous to perilous. The text received mixed reviews from critics: most found the story grisly and repulsive. In spite of the loathsome Polk Street residents, Norris garnered praise for his less than idealized depiction of the people living in the Californian city: "Norris had made himself so thoroughly at home in his setting that such details flowed easily from him pen"² (Pizer 259). In the wake of the Civil War and in the

midst of rebuilding the morale of newly-united Americans, the publication of *McTeague* also coincided with shifting gender politics. At a time when women were entering the workforce, the domestic sphere, once presided over by the Angel in the House, was being reconsidered in favor of an independent New Woman. This dichotomy of feminine role models in the time Norris wrote *McTeague* presented women with a choice to be made between tradition and advancement.

Norris's Naturalist work ran contrary to most popular literature consumed in the nineteenth century. In the midst of civil warfare, slavery and constitutional changes, writers such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain defined the literary tone beginning around the 1850s. According to Fred Lewis Patee, the intensity of the Mexican War and Civil War coupled with the high emotional toll it played on American society gave audiences a taste for superfluity: "Excess demands always more excess" (8). The internal American conflict between the North and the South caused a heightened interest in literature, particularly adventure stories, as an escape from the political turmoil of the nation. However, Patee notes the American reading audience's need for "circuses, melodrama, [and] 'shilling-shocker' fiction" because they "crave[d] added emotional stimulants" during and after the war (8). With the California Gold Rush in full swing by the middle of the century, literature about the Gold Coast and its virtually unexplored terrain had gained popularity. Writers such as Edwin Bryant, John C. Fremont, Francis Bret Harte, and Baylord Taylor created a utopian picture of the West Coast, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. Popular fiction like reporter Taylor's *Eldorado* (1850), according to Patee, depicted a Californian landscape of "hospitality and mutual helpfulness, with a minimum of crime," which reflected Taylor's view of "the

boundlessness of the land, its promise for rich agriculture, its amazing diversity, [and] its beauty” (14). Taylor’s picturesque portrayal creates a romantic landscape that Norris’s *McTeague* shatters.

As Norris himself notes, he chose San Francisco as a backdrop for his text because of the city’s isolation from the rest of the country. The adventure stories of California were popular because of the lure in discovering the unknown. Norris describes the Bay City in an essay for the San Francisco *Wave* in 1897:

Perhaps no great city of the world is so isolated as we are. Did you ever think of that? There is no great city to the north of us, to the south none nearer than Mexico, to the west is the waste of the Pacific, to the east the waste of the deserts. Here we are set down as a pin point in a vast circle of solitude. Isolation produces individuality, originality [...] San Francisco must grow by expansion from within; and so we have time and opportunity to develop certain unhampered types and characters and habits unbiased by outside influence, types that are admirably adapted to fictitious treatment. (qtd. in Pizer 248)

San Francisco’s separation from the rest of America gave Norris freedom to completely invent his characters. These fictive characters tell a story of adventure that works in heavy contrast to the American hero taking on the West, which would have been the character prototype reading audiences associated with stories based in California.

Contrasting the hopeful and positive view of Taylor’s California, *McTeague*, published nearly half a century after *Eldorado*, received contemporary criticism for the violent and bleak depiction of working-class life in San Francisco. John D. Barry reviewed *McTeague* in March of 1899³ noting, “many readers would consider the subject

too unpleasant to be treated in fiction.”⁴ However, Barry also praised the text as one of “the few great novels produced in this country” and goes on to place Norris among other contemporary American storytellers, such as William Dean Howells and Stephen Crane (9). The following month, Edward and Madeline Vaughn Abbott responded to Barry’s review. The Abbotts agreed in part with Barry’s praise: “That Mr. Norris has written an exceptionally strong and powerful novel we do not wish to deny [...] but grossness for the sake of grossness is unpardonable. Mr. Norris has written pages for which there is absolutely no excuse.”⁵ The reviewers also recognized *McTeague* as a work that stands out from the rest because of the “relentless truth” of his story and the “rare skill” Norris uses to write and develop his characters.

Although Norris’s characters were believable representations of real life, the subject matter contrasted with widely read magazines of the day, targeted at female readers, such as *Godey’s Lady’s Books* and *Graham’s Magazines*. *McTeague* followed a half-century long readership of lady’s books and would have been a difficult transition for readers of fiction, particularly woman. These woman-focused works contained a variety of pieces that reinforced the Angel in the House ideal through poems, illustrations about fashion or life known as “plates,” short stories from independent authors, and sheet music. Each issue contained a fashion plate portraying the latest in women’s fashion; one fashion plate in *Godey’s* being so influential as to inspire the time-honored tradition of the bride wearing a white dress at her wedding.⁶ In addition, a pattern was included in each issue for an item women could sew at home. Authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Nathaniel Hawthorne published works in *Godey’s Lady’s Books*. Focusing on the domestic sphere and a women’s place in it,

these monthlies were widely read and looked to as a guide for the housewife and an ideal for every woman. *McTeague*'s Trina would have been considered a perversion of this praised nineteenth-century "Angel," especially given her psychological deterioration and physical afflictions suffered as a result of McTeague's violence.

Norris's inspiration for the "gruesome" and "brutal" relationship between McTeague and Trina was based on an actual event that took place in San Francisco during October 1893 between Patrick and Sarah Collins. Collins stabbed his wife, Sarah "because she would not give him money."⁷ This horrific and sensational murder serves as the backdrop for Norris's text. However, the reviews condemn Norris's gore and rarely consider this homicide as a source of inspiration for *McTeague*, in spite of the wide coverage of the heinous crime. The lack of attention to his inspiration is puzzling because of their ready critique of the less-than-pleasant, but nonetheless real, content of *McTeague*. Norris does not just use the Collins homicide as a minor inspiration for his novel; rather, he builds a back-story in order to set up the circumstances that would cause such a horrendous crime. All the characters in the novel suffer to one extent or the other. *McTeague* makes a strong statement regarding society's influence over humanity, specifically in the portrayal of the effects of Naturalistic influences that play out through gender and ethnic inequalities, as well as economic gains and losses.

At the time *McTeague* was published, many were already arguing for women's suffrage, which eventually would bring about the nineteenth amendment in 1920. Charlotte Rich thoroughly examines the influences on American society during this era in history. In addition, Rich traces the transition from the Angel in the House to the New Woman through American political history during the nineteenth century. Although the

term “New Woman” did not reach the height of popularity until around 1894, British novelist Sarah Grand first referenced the term in her essay “The New Aspects of the Woman Question.” Grand describes “those who were dissatisfied with nineteenth century prescriptions of femininity” (Rich 1): the New Woman is a woman who “has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with the Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy” (Grand). Novelist Ouida decided to make the term a proper noun through the use of capitalization in May 1894: “The Workingman and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English tongue, and each is convinced that on its own especial W hangs the future of the world.”⁸ Rich notes the American existence of the New Woman ideal long before Ouida coined the phrase. Anne Bradstreet’s poetry reflects similar ideology about women in public and private spheres: these references are made as early as 1650.⁹

As industrial technology progressed during the nineteenth century, Rich explains, the division between the public and private spheres became more defined, especially in the middle and upper classes. New societal expectations on gendered behavior created a dichotomy between masculine and feminine roles leading to the development of women “as agents of moral influence [...] expected to maintain the domestic sphere as a cheerful, pure haven for their husbands to return to each evening” (4). However, toward the end of the nineteenth century, women maintained a presence in the workforce during this time more than ever before with “18 percent” earning pay for their work in 1890¹⁰ (Costa 103). Women entered the workforce and, by the end of the nineteenth century, occupied jobs in “the service or manufacturing sector” (Costa 108). This does not account for non-paid

labor, such as “family farm labor, boardinghouse-keepers,” or other domestic service jobs (Costa 103). The availability of low-skill jobs allowed these women who previously were only able to participate in non-paid labor to earn outside the home.

Dora L. Costa examines the options for the female workforce during the nineteenth century, particularly focusing on women leaving non-paid labor jobs in favor of paid positions in areas of manufacturing advancement. Once factory jobs became more available, women who had been working on family farms and in boarding houses moved out of domestic labor and into the public sphere: “Industrialization divided the workplace and the home and decreased the economic activity of married women. It increased the participation of young, single women in paid labor prior to 1850 because the spread of new large-scale methods of production facilitated the substitution of unskilled for skilled labor” (107). Single women dominated the workforce because of the overabundance of inexperienced workers; these workers required less pay than trained laborers.

The statistics Costa cites show close to 41 percent of single women, primarily from “working-class families” (101), making up the workforce in 1890, and only less than 5 percent of married women in the labor force (106). Unfortunately for unmarried working-women, particularly “immigrants,” paid labor cemented their low status in society because of the lack of upward mobility. The conditions of industrial jobs were dangerous due to lack of regulations for women, in addition to being heavily laborious and stringent: “A working women in 1890 was faced with an average work day of 9.5 hours, six days a week. The length of the workday was rigid, with penalties for tardiness. Only outwork, with its low pay, or boardinghouse-keeping, with its requirement of home ownership, provided opportunities for part-time work” (108-9). If women wanted to work

outside of the domestic sphere, the requirements were demanding. Women of either married or unmarried status had opportunities available, but the environment and circumstances were less than ideal.

Meanwhile, their wealthier counterparts began “looking outside the home for amusement, education, and professional pursuits” (Rich 4). This “leisure class” consisted specifically of economically-dependent women, who relied on their husbands for their financial security. Novelist Charlotte Perkins Gilman critiques this group of women in 1898 in her book length essay *Woman and Economics*. Gilman’s concludes that “a woman’s economic dependence on her husband perpetuated her sense of helplessness and inferiority in the marriage relationship” (8). Margaret Fuller, a precursor to Gilman’s work on class relations and gender issues, wrote a pioneering text in 1845 titled *Women in the Nineteenth Century*. Her writings reached a pinnacle at the famous Seneca Falls convention in July 1848. Fuller discusses the need for a revitalization of mutual respect between the sexes if humanity is to flourish: “My highest wish is that this truth should be distinctly and rationally apprehended, and the condition of life and freedom recognized as the same for the daughter and the sons of time” (Fuller vi). As the century progressed and women’s voices were being heard, the New Woman quickly became associated with the suffragette; Rich explains: “Though the female vote might not improve society as radically as some of its most idealistic advocates prophesied, this new privilege would irrevocably undermine or even invert, the division between public and domestic space” (11). Trina is struggling with these circumstances: she is a woman in a time of social revolution, as well as a lower-class woman trying to climb her way up the economic ladder.

Thus, Trina is caught between the two conflicting ideals that battle throughout her generation, the Angel in the House and the New Woman. The Angel in the House was a morally pure woman who gave herself wholly to her family. She was meek and mild, both socially and sexually. Additionally, the Angel was elegant, delightful, and religious. This ideal woman owes her genesis to the poet Coventry Patmore. In his 1854 poem, “The Angel in the House,” Patmore immortalized his wife, Emily, as the ideal woman for all women, particularly wives, to aspire. The poem was so influential within the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century that Virginia Woolf references the restrictive characteristics within Patmore’s pervasive poem. In her 1931 paper, “Professions for Women,” Woolf states, “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (qtd. in Showalter 207). Contrasting the Angel in the House, the New Woman sought an education, work outside of the home, and autonomy through legal rights such as property ownership and voting privileges.

The transition did not come without serious backlash from men and women alike. By permitting all classes of women¹¹ entry into the public sphere, the lines between the public and private spheres were being blurred. For leftist and progressive women this emergence was a welcomed change worth fighting for. On the other side of the political fence, the more conservative women believed the private sphere was a women’s place, and being subservient to her husband was in a woman’s innate nature.¹² The New Woman focuses more on independence through financial security than on creating a domestic space and a family. Her focus on autonomy leads to a shift away from a personal identification with inherent, reproductive value; instead, her aim is towards monetary value. Anne Boyd describes the movement away from the Angel in the House

toward the New Woman: “American women who had been raised to believe that their sole purpose in life was to create a happy home and devote themselves to the benefit of others began to assert their right to live for themselves [...] erod[ing] the cultural hegemony of the domestic feminine ideal, the so-called angel of the house” (341). This value shift leads to a change in behavior for the New Woman, and Norris’s Trina is a representation of this change. Trina’s character is a woman caught between valuing the domestic space, pleasing her husband, and bearing children as her primary concerns, and the progressive woman who works to earn her own money, gain legal rights, and increase her agency. The domestic value that once held a woman’s attention is replaced with the New Woman’s need to stand out from the Angel in the House ideal: the Angel is replaced by the earner.

TELLING HER STORY: TRINA'S HISTORY

McTeague can be viewed as a perspective on the deterioration of a woman caught between her domestic responsibilities and an obsession with freedom and power through earning money. Trina is an example of the woman caught in the transitional place because of her lack of agency and uncertainty with regards to a feminine role model. Boyd describes this shift away from the Angel in the House toward the New Woman. The minds of the younger generation of women were changing, and the ideology of the New Woman came to fruition: "Young women began to think of themselves as unique individuals rather than 'true women,' initiating the decades-long movement toward the independent 'new woman,' who would become a major cultural phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century" (340). Any movement toward the New Woman undermined the Angel in the House and created drastic change and a struggle deciding with which ideal to identify.

The shift between these ideals occurs in the novel between generational groups: Trina and her mother. Mrs. Sieppe's generation was raised to value domestic space, attend to her husband's needs above her own, and bear children; she embodies the Angel in the House. Her devotion to her husband is apparent when the family moves on the eve of her daughter's wedding because Mr. Sieppe wants to start an upholstery business in Los Angeles. Mrs. Sieppe's role of the self-sacrificing wife is dramatized in her conversation with Trina on the evening of her wedding. Trina cries and begs her mother to stay with her. She is afraid of the unknown with her marriage to McTeague and does not want her mother to leave her behind. Trina cannot fully accept her life as a grown

woman, much less a married one. This heartbreaking separation of mother and daughter reflects the sacrifices expected of women whose lives were devoted to their husbands.

Just as Mrs. Siette did not possess power of most things in her life, Trina lacks agency in the multiple ways she suffers loss. The first instance comes as a loss of her physical self when she suffers a loss of power over her body and sexual consent in the dental chair. While she is under the anesthetic, McTeague kisses her without her permission. After she comes out of anesthesia and McTeague suggests the two get married, Trina adamantly "refus[es] without knowing why" (23). The text goes on to explain that Trina harbored within herself, "a fear of him, an intuitive feminine fear of the male" (23). McTeague's assertion of power over Trina's passive position in the chair causes Trina not only to lose McTeague's respect, but McTeague's actions cause a hidden fear in Trina that she admits to on their wedding night: "What, indeed, was Trina afraid of? She could not tell. But what did she know of McTeague, after all? Who was this man that had come into her life, who had taken her from her home and from her parents [...]" (103) Whether or not Trina's fear stems from McTeague taking advantage of her in the dental chair or because Trina has an instinct about his untrustworthiness is unclear to her. Even though Trina is not consciously aware of being violated, she will forever feel connected to McTeague because of his actions; the violation that robbed Trina of her innocence and purity.

Trina suffers additional loss before she and McTeague are married, when he spends the night at her home following the picnic with her family. Upon coming into her empty room, he stands in the middle of the room cautiously taking in the surroundings. The descriptive words McTeague attributes to Trina's room are "clean" and "tiny" (46).

The "white netting" over her bed is described as a bridal veil concealing the pure bride. Being over Trina's bed, the veiling serves as a metaphor for her underlying sexuality. The sexual energy is palpable in the narrator's description of McTeague's experience in his fiancée's bedroom. To McTeague, Trina's room is "a little nest, intimate, discreet" (46); he sees the room as an extension of Trina's body.

The sexual tension in McTeague intensifies while he is in her room. He smells her hairbrush and goes "from one object to another, beholding Trina in everything he touched or looked at" (47). McTeague spots her closet door that is partially opened. The closet is the place where the items most intimate with Trina's body are kept. McTeague touches the clothes as he would touch her body. Looking at them he feels "he could hardly have been more overcome" (47); it is as if Trina were in the room with him and is physically exciting him. McTeague begins "gingerly, stroking [the clothes] softly with his huge leathern palms" (47). He smells her "exquisite feminine odor" and imagines Trina's body in fragments: "her mouth, her hands, her neck" (47). When he can no longer stand casually perusing her clothing, he enters her closet. "With an unreasoned impulse" he grabs the garments and "plunging his face in them" his reaction is almost post-orgasmic: "[He] savor[s] their delicious odor with long breaths of luxury and supreme content" (48). This intimate space, Trina's bedroom, is violated by McTeague. His uncontrollable sexual urges, first in the dental chair and now in her closet, violate Trina's body and then the closet, which McTeague views as an extension of her body.

Philip Cavalier examines McTeague's violations of Trina. In doing so, Cavalier uses a comparison between mining and rape to signify McTeague's conflation between the land and the female body since he was formerly a miner. The first defiling of Trina's

body is in the dental chair, Cavalier discusses, but McTeague also inflicts rape on Trina's clothes in her closet. Because McTeague views the clothing as "a whole group of Trinas" his entry into her closet and fondling of her garments is another violation of Trina (Norris 47). The ultimate delight in McTeague's rape of Trina's closet is not just in the erotic gratification and release it brings him, but it maintains her sexual purity, something of utmost importance to McTeague: "The rape of Trina's wardrobe is significant both because it leaves no waste--the real Trina is not marked in McTeague's eyes by a 'smudge of foul ordure'--and because McTeague achieves complete gratification without Trina's presence" (Cavalier 136). McTeague does not seek to sully Trina for his own sexual gratification. When he assaults her clothes, Trina does not suffer any loss of sexual innocence from McTeague's perspective, not in the way that she does when he kisses her while she is anesthetized. Instead, the loss Trina suffers is another invasion of privacy. His intrusion into her closet is less invasive than kissing her while she is unconscious in the dental chair, but still violates her by extension.

After these violations, Trina is no longer as adamantly opposed to McTeague as she was after he proposed to her. Instead, the two began spending more time together: "The picnic at Schuetzen Park decided matters. McTeague began to call on Trina regularly" (48). Because Trina's feelings change toward McTeague so abruptly, their sexual connection to one another is present, whether Trina consciously recognizes it from the dental chair or not. Trina's sexual purity is something important to her and something she does not surrender until after the two are married. Her traditional upbringing, the part of Trina on which is ingrained the values of the Angel in the House, tells her that her

sexual experiences should only be shared with her husband. Therefore, McTeague's sexual interactions with Trina further cement the connection between the two.

Because of this intimate interaction, Trina's feelings for McTeague transform from an underlying draw to him that she feels after they are married into a realization that her love for him comes from her submission to him: "Indeed, it seemed to her that it was only *after* her marriage with the dentist that she had really begun to love him. With the absolute final surrender of herself, the irrevocable, ultimate submission, had come an affection the like of which she had never dreamed" (104-5). The use of italics here draws attention to the word "after," if the focus is on how Trina loved him "*after*" they were married, Trina's love for McTeague solidified after their marriage was consummated. Although the two had a sexually-charged encounter while Trina was unconscious, not until their marriage was sexually validated did Trina realize her submission to and affection for McTeague. The initial attraction Trina feels for McTeague when she accepts his engagement is the latent sexual connection she has with him after his violation of her in the dental chair. Nevertheless, Cavalier argues Trina only accepts McTeague's proposal because he overpowers her (137). Considering Trina's erotic desire to be dominated, the point can be further argued here that it is a sexual connection, one that involves being controlled, that draws Trina to McTeague.

Donald Pizer examines the sexual connection between the McTeagues that exists both before and after their marriage. Norris, Pizer says, struggles to portray effectively the "overt sexual innocence yet intuitive sexuality" that exists between Trina and McTeague during their engagement (309). Trina struggles against a natural urge to be dominated by McTeague; similarly, McTeague grapples with his desire to take control of

Trina. Instead of a romantic attraction, Pizer says that Norris creates a Naturalistic attraction, a sexual link, that unites the two: “The possessive sexual desire of the man aroused by the first woman he experiences sensually, the instinctive desire of the woman for sexual submission responding to the first man who assaults her—these are the atavistic animal forces which bring Trina and McTeague together” (310). Pizer argues that the two have little in common other than their shared sadomasochistic sexual relationship involving domination and submission to unite them. After they are married and their union is consummated, Trina’s subconscious initial connection to McTeague begins to surface in her conscious knowledge. The longer they are married, the more clearly Trina sees her love for McTeague: “She began to love him more and more, not for what he was, but for what she had given up to him” (106). Trina’s attachment to McTeague transforms into what she identifies as love.

Whether Trina’s connection to him is actually love, what is clear about the relationship between the McTeagues is their shared attraction to violence. From the kiss in the dental office until the final moment of Trina’s life, McTeague’s treatment of Trina is brutish. Barbara Hochman describes Trina’s loss of sexual control in her marriage to McTeague as a loss of control over herself: “But for Trina, sexual surrender means surrender and submission of many kinds, culminating in her feeling that she has lost control, and, therefore, lost herself” (350). Trina sees herself in terms of her sexuality because it is all she has to offer, other than the gold coins with which she will never part. McTeague’s control over her is erotic, while simultaneously threatening her identity. Ultimately, McTeague treats her body as a possession that is his for the taking, with or without Trina’s consent.

When he “extort[s] money” from Trina by chewing on her fingers “for his own satisfaction,” McTeague’s private interactions with Trina foreshadow his brutal actions toward her later in the novel (171). The torture McTeague inflicts on Trina only makes her devotion for him stronger: “And in some strange, inexplicable way this brutality made Trina all the more affectionate; aroused in her a morbid, unwholesome love of submission, a strange, unnatural pleasure in yielding, in surrendering herself to the will of an irresistible, virile power” (171). The “brutality” McTeague shows toward Trina, usually after he has been drinking, gives her sexual pleasure; Trina desires McTeague’s strength to dominate her. Whereas Trina was once afraid of McTeague for reasons she could not consciously identify, now, the text implies, the brute sexually arouses her.

Even in Trina’s death scene, she continues clinging to McTeague. In spite of his physical violence towards her, Trina’s need for domination is present during her beating. The narrator describes this scene in an eerily concise sentence: “Then it became abominable” (206). Trina reaches out to McTeague and tries to embrace him¹³: “It did not seem as if flesh and bone could endure such stress and yet live. But still, like any cat, she writhed and panted [...] struggling to get close to him, to get her arms about him” (206). Once described in terms of child-like innocence and delicateness, Trina has now been reduced to an animal. Even as she loses her life, her humanity is taken from her. Trina’s final insult is being categorized by those same characteristics of the brute who robs her of her money and her life.

Her losses disconnect her from sole agency over her body, the lottery winnings, and her humanity. Trina is unable to regain her pre-McTeague innocence and purity through the violations of which she is a victim. Therefore, Trina clings to the money that

acts as a substitution for her physical value before the violation in the dentist's chair and before she loses her virginity to McTeague: "It had been a dreadful wrench for Trina to break in upon her precious five thousand. She clung to this sum with a tenacity that was surprising; it had become for her a thing miraculous, a god-from-the-machine [...] she regarded it as something almost sacred and inviolable" (89). The narrator describes Trina's views of her money in terms of a holy or religious experience: "miraculous," "god-from-the-machine," "sacred," and "inviolable."

Trina's lottery winnings serve as her *deus ex machina* in two distinct ways. First, because Trina won the money and was engaged to marry, her family focused on financial opportunities in order to ensure their survival, like moving to Los Angeles and starting a new business. Second, the money seems to serve as a substitution for her self-worth. The more money she collects in her trunk, the more powerful she feels. But as the text conveys, the power Trina gains from the winnings awakens urges within her that cause a psychological downward spiral: "She had all [...] the instinct which saves without any thought, without idea of consequence—saving for the sake of saving, hoarding without knowing why" (78-9). The lottery winnings do not function as a means of frivolity for Trina, but a form of salvation, something that will save her or fill some void within her. However, the money Trina uses as her savior from her lower class economic existence comes to her illegally¹⁴ through the lottery and not earned by her own labor. The positive aspect of the winnings is that the couple is able to secure a three-room apartment across the hall from McTeague's dental offices. When her family leaves on the day of Trina and McTeague's wedding, Trina's trunks are delivered "to her new home—the remodeled photographer's rooms" (90). The trunk is the sole material item Trina begins adult life

and marriage to McTeague with, as well as the key piece in the demise of her marriage and a component in her murder.

A SPACE OF HER OWN: TRINA'S TRUNK AS A TRANSITIONAL DOMESTIC SPACE

Instead of a home, Trina's trunk substitutes as a domestic space and can move from place to place. The contents of the trunk are concealed from McTeague, and Trina is the only one who tends to the items inside the trunk. The care and respect that she once paid to the first apartment with McTeague are transferred to the trunk and the act of filling the trunk with what she values and treasures most after McTeague loses his job. The trunk is described as holding her bridal dress, the last article of clothing she wore as an unmarried woman. Furthermore, "at the very bottom of the trunk, under her bridal dress" is Trina's precious collection of gold coins. At the same time that Trina holds these things as her prized possessions that are worthy to be locked up and protected in her trunk, these items within her chest also serve to represent the ideals that conflict her. The bridal dress associates Trina with the Angel in the House, who is the wholesome and devoted bride. In marrying, Trina is following a traditional female role. But the wedding dress is not alone in the chest. Hidden under that dress is the money that also gives her the power of the New Woman: the power of independence and freedom.

The first instance in the text of a trunk being specifically referenced as belonging to Trina is when it is dropped off at her new home. From that point forward, the trunk is a fixture in every place of Trina lives. Within the trunk, Trina keeps her wedding dress, but under her wedding dress, in a "brass match-safe"¹⁵ she keeps what amounts to a "savings bank": "She did not save this money for any ulterior purpose, she hoarded instinctively, without knowing why" (107). At first, the coins fit within the tiny case, but as Trina

continues to hoard, the match safe is full and the excess is stored in a “chamois-skin sack she made from an old chest protector” (119). According to *The Dictionary of Fashion History*, a “chest protector” was also known as a “bosom friend” and was used from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. A “bosom friend” was a piece “of wool, flannel or fur” that would cover a woman décolletage and worked as “bust improver” to give women a bit more volume at their necklines.¹⁶ Thus, the sack used to keep Trina’s money safe is repurposed from an item she would use “improve” herself. Additionally, the fact that the bag is made from a piece of fabric that was formerly positioned near her heart is significant in connecting the esteem of her hoard to her physical being.

Trina’s trunk serves to house particular items that she feels need keeping safe, such as her wedding dress, but more importantly, her precious savings. In this way, the trunk is similar to a hope chest. Herbert A. Otto and Robert B. Andersen discuss the etymology and purpose of hope chests and describe the hope chest as “a chest or trunk” where “young women had gathered linen, silver and other articles for an extended period prior to marriage” (15). The chests would be filled with items collected over time while the woman was still living with her family, and, sometimes, before she was engaged to marry. Otto and Andersen explore the history and purpose of the hope chest as a custom typically practiced by “middle and lower class families”: “For many girls with either a peasant or middle-class background, it became an established practice to begin a hope chest during adolescence or before. Successive waves of immigrants brought this custom to the American shore” (15). Trina’s family’s European immigrant background as German-Swiss and working-class status is conducive to the hope chest tradition.

Although the text does not mention Trina's trunk as being specifically used as a hope chest, the Sieppe family likely knew the tradition, even if they did not practice the custom.

Furthermore, the hope chest is a location to collect items "in anticipation of marriage"(17). The woman brings the hope chest filled with what she hopes the marriage will be, which is reflected in what she can monetarily provide for her union through the items within the chest. Otto and Andersen conclude with the following assertion: "the hope chest represents on a symbolical level a young woman's aspirations and on a reality level her concrete investment in the marital estate" (19). Her family's financial means dictate the quality and volume of what the trunk would contain, indicating their contribution to and expectation of the couple's marriage. Therefore, if Trina's trunk functioned as a hope chest, the trunk should act as a "pre-home" or a reflection of the domestic space she hopes to create with her future husband. But in Trina's case, her trunk is given to her on the day she is married. Instead of housing things collected for her home with McTeague, the trunks arrive with her belongings from the house she lived in with her family before her marriage. These items are hers, not acquired during the marriage and not for use in the McTeagues's home. This mentality reflects how Trina views the items within the trunk for the rest of the text: as hers and hers only.

Because Trina views these items solely as hers, the money she wins in the lottery that is kept in the trunk is also thought of as only belonging to her. Her winnings serve as a way to provide for both her and McTeague after his dental practice collapses. Thereafter, Trina becomes the financially independent New Woman. She gains the ability to contribute to the McTeague household beyond her domestic responsibilities by carving

animals for her Uncle Oelbermann's "wholesale toy store in the Mission" (56). After winning the money Trina's excitement transforms into obsession: "Trina had always been an economical little body, but it was only since her great winning in the lottery that she had been especially penurious" (107). In spite of having acquired a small fortune in her winnings, Trina's urge to hoard money begins spiraling out of control. Trina's manic behavior is described as "oscillating from one extreme to another" (107), and this response can be seen as consequence of being caught between two feminine ideals. This displacement creates a failure of autonomy in Trina. In order to regain control over her identity, she results to hoarding money. The money that she feels signifies her value is stored in her trunk.

The money is thoroughly concealed, shielded from view by the wedding dress and protected by the chamois bag. The devastation and resentment she feels toward McTeague after she finds the trunk "broken and rifled" (191) is significant when examining the trunk as an intimate space for Trina. The trunk is positioned as a transitional domestic space, as well as a space Trina deeply identifies as being solely hers. Trina has diligently collected this money and spent time caring for her hoard. She goes so far as polishing "the gold pieces with a mixture of soap and ashes until they shone" (170). When he steals the money, McTeague's violent assertion of power is devastating and practically unforgiveable: "'I could have forgiven him if he had only gone away and left me my money. I could have—yes, I could have forgiven him even *this*'—she looked at the stumps of her fingers. 'But now,' her teeth closed tight and her eyes flashed, 'now-I'll-never-forgive-him-as-long-as-I-live'" (194). Trina has alienated her family and friends and isolated herself in order to accumulate the money, and

McTeague's theft of her precious savings is similar to a physical violation. Since Trina's identity resides in the money she hoards in her trunk, McTeague foraging the chest is essentially violating her again, just as he did when he kissed her in the dentist's chair.

Jennifer Fleissner explains Trina's hoarding as the result of her inability to bear children. Trina's self worth is housed in the quantity of money she hoards because that is the only value she can obtain (or seems to want to obtain): "As she keeps her money out of circulation, so does she 'hoard' her reproductive powers; the gold remains 'a nest egg, a monstrous, roc-like nest egg, not so large, however, but that it could be made larger'" (107-8). In order to regain value, Trina turns to obsessive money hoarding in an attempt to replenish her reproductive value. Likewise, Fleissner suggests that Trina's self-image directly relates to the amount of money that fills her bag. To Trina, the thought of the bag being unfilled is "lamentable," just as the thought of her value being depleted because of her empty womb is. Fleissner equates Trina's depleted "chamois bag" with her inability to reproduce: "[I]t seems more to the point to imagine here breasts depleted of milk and, again, to insist on the relation of Trina's obsessions" (213). Fleissner's association of Trina's lack of propagation is only part of the reason why Trina hoards the money, to fill the void where children would typically be.

However, the text is ambiguous about Trina and McTeague's ability to have children or if they simply decide against having a family of their own. Certain aspects of the text seem to point to the former. After McTeague robs her of her savings, the text indicates Trina mourns the loss of this money as she would the death of her baby: "Day after day she took [the empty chamois bag and the brass match-box] from her trunk and wept over them as other women weep over a dead baby's shoe" (194). Rather than

focusing on or being distracted by children or the prospect of children, Trina focuses on earning and hoarding money.

Trina cares for the coins as a good Angel in the House would treasure her family. Trina meticulously protects and looks after the coins within the transitional domestic space, just as she tends to the home she first shares with McTeague. Trina wears her apron during this task, which associates polishing the coins with other domestic tasks: “She counted it and recounted it and made little piles of it, rubbed the gold pieces between the folds of her apron until they shone” (119). She diligently cleans her money and methodically keeps track of every piece. At a time when women were encouraged to find significance and worth from their roles as wives and mothers, Trina relies on her accumulation of and caring for her money to cement her value.

Because Trina does not have any children of her own to look after, she uses her creation of her Noah’s ark wooden sculptures to earn more money to which she can tend. The money she earns allows her to compensate for her lack of reproductive abilities. In the Biblical story, Noah’s ark was filled two by two, and the animals were paired so they could reproduce after the floodwaters subsided. Just as Noah and his family gathered the animals for the ark, Trina carefully gathers the animals she carves to fill the arks in Uncle Oelbermann’s shop. Trina creates these animals, two by two, which gives her a sense of reproducing, but on her own terms and without assistance from anyone else. Because she creates these carved animals from nothing but a piece of wood and her skillful carving, Trina’s agency is solidified in her wooden herds. However, Trina’s creations are labeled as something other than her own; each animal bears the sticker “made in France.” Her talent as a whittler may give her a temporary sense of agency, but her artistic credit is

sharply undercut when the stickers are attached to them. The stickers aid in creating a façade of their creator; Trina's work is meaningless and not credited to her.

After McTeague loses his dental practice, Trina's side interest of carving Noah's Ark animals becomes a means to prevent her savings from being spent. What was once a hobby to earn extra money and only took up a few hours each afternoon transforms into a full-fledged fixation. When discussing the transformation of the domestic space into an area for work, Fleissner posits: "The book clearly implies that the decline of the McTeagues' domestic life cannot be separated from Trina's transformation of the home into a kind of factory" (204). There is no longer a marked delineation between the home and where she takes up her paid hobby; instead, the remnants of the factory are left all over the house in "streaks and spots of the 'non-poisonous' paint" and the "whittlings and chips" from the wood (160). The home that was once clean and orderly has transformed into a "factory."

Since Trina does not recognize the domestic space as a home, her transformation of the McTeagues's apartment into a factory is not surprising. The metamorphosis of their apartment into a factory only serves one purpose: to continue to fill Trina's trunk with gold coins. Her disregard for neatness and order is trivial if keeping clean takes away from the time it takes her to make animals that bring in money to fill her trunk. Because Trina's self-worth is calculated in terms of how much can be collected in the transitional domestic space, she is willing to sacrifice at all costs to fill the empty space that she thinks will make her feel whole.

NO PLACE TO CALL HOME: TRINA'S DOMESTIC SPACES

Trina's transitional position between two feminine ideals echoes her dissociation with a traditional domestic space: the family's home. A home has connotations very different from a house or a dwelling place. The term "home" usually invokes feelings of warmth and belonging, a safe place where one is surrounded by loved ones. During the nineteenth century, the lady's books and magazines would give women advice on how to decorate their homes. Attention was paid to details and décor. The home was a place filled with all things valued: loved ones, family heirlooms, photographs, and handmade items. However, Trina does not identify the apartments or the room over the school as her home, at least not for any significant length of time.

This first apartment the newlyweds share is idealized in the novel, and the other apartments or rooms the couple shares are measured against the time spent in the first apartment. However, the McTeague's apartment is more of a make-shift home since it is a repurposed studio. The apartment is described as being "part of the suite of a bankrupt photographer" (77), which the two rented mostly furnished with "only the kitchen and dining-room utensils" being purchased by the newlyweds (89). The apartment is situated on the second floor of the tenement across from McTeague's dental office. The only room in the apartment Trina furnishes and decorates is the kitchen, which is described as "a creation of Trina's, a dream of a kitchen [...] Everything was new; everything was complete" (91). Trina gives careful consideration to how she will decorate the kitchen, and the narrator describes Trina's creation as "new" and "complete." These words signify a clean start in the McTeague's first home.

In spite of being described as whole and finished, pleasantly decorated, and cared

for, the apartment is flawed. The permanent smell of the "photographer's chemicals" lingers in the apartment: "Trina could never quite eradicate from their rooms a certain faint and indefinable odor, particularly offensive to her" (125). No matter what steps are taken to air out the apartment or make it "new," remnants of the bankrupt photographer linger permanently in the structure of the apartment. The smell of the chemicals was "the only drawback to their delightful home" (125). The newlyweds move into the apartment ready to start their lives together, but the fate suffered by the former tenant seeps into the lives of the McTeagues. Just as the chemicals he used in his studio have permeated the walls of the apartment, his unfavorable circumstances serve as an ominous shadow over the couple. While Trina and McTeague live in the three-room apartment, their morality, similar to the photographer's finances, begins to decay. By the time the two move out of the apartment, McTeague has been exposed as not having a dental license or a degree, and Trina's obsessive saving is in the beginning phases of her eventual mania. Just as the apartment is not one thing or another—no longer a factory and not a wholly pleasant home—Trina's varying personality shares the inconsistencies of the former photographer's studio.

Graham examines the dwelling places of the McTeagues and notes the childlikeness of the three-room apartment. The home does not reflect an adult atmosphere, but instead a juvenile one with ironic connotations. The art hung on the walls of their apartment reflects a sexual innocence: the purity of two children kneeling to pray has a naïve quality that is not reflected in the McTeague's relationship. However, the photographs are ironic in that they are the only children the McTeagues will ever have. Later, Trina sells them off at auction and adds more gold coins to her trunk. Graham

positions Trina and McTeague as “grandparents who are never parents” (322). Again, the McTeagues reflect their home: they are acting as something they are not and will never be.

Even though this domestic space is not exactly what it seems, Trina keeps a clean home and acts as the Angel in the House. In spite of using their apartment as a factory for a few hours a day to create the Noah's ark animals in the home, Trina manages to keep the house tidy and efficient: "Her household duties began more and more to absorb her attention, for she was an admirable housekeeper, keeping the little suite in marvelous good order and regulating the schedule of expenditure with an economy that often bordered on positive niggardliness (107)." Trina takes care to keep the house clean, running errands, doing chores and paying visits to friends. Great detail is given to her daily routine and the amount of time she spends on each task, with the couple waking “on weekdays [...] at half past six” and keeping a solid routine (109). At that time, Trina begins her tasks for the day: “sponging off the oilcloth table-spread, making the bed, pottering about with a broom or duster or cleaning rag”; “open[ing] the windows to air the rooms”; “descended to the street, where she spent a delicious hour [...] in the huge market [...] in the grocer’s store [...] before the counters of the haberdasher’s”; “rubbing elbows with the great ladies of the avenue”; she “met an acquaintance or two”; made lunch; and whittled and painted her Noah’s ark animals (110). These domestic tasks and chores align Trina with the role of the Angel in the House.

During this time in Trina’s life she feels settled. She works to care for her home; she spends her days running errands and completing domestic tasks. Trina comes home with her mother’s “brown net reticule [...] full of parcels” from her daily shopping (110).

Trina, tired from her chores and shopping for the home, hires a woman to come and cook dinner for the McTeagues, because “even Trina was not equal to the task of preparing three meals a day” (110). Trina feels as if she can afford little luxuries now that she and McTeague are married and his business supports them. Her Noah’s Ark animal money and lottery interest serve only as additional income.

However, once McTeague loses the dental practice and Trina realizes that her savings may be at risk of being spent, the attention she once paid to taking care of her home changes. The unpaid labor within the domestic space that Trina once performed routinely is replaced with carving the Noah’s Ark animals for money. The kitchen, the room Trina diligently decorated and furnished, was a type of factory that did not contribute monetarily to the household. Instead, the kitchen being used as a factory creates physical sustenance for her and her husband. In that room Trina made meals; she produced items that would not only sustain the couple, but brought them together three times a day. Her production of food in this domestic factory situates her with the Angel in the House taking pride in being the overseer of her private sphere.

While down in the street on her errands, Trina looks up at her home, almost as an outsider. Trina is outside looking in; she observes the detail of the apartment, the curtains and the maid cleaning, but she looks up at these windows as someone who is simultaneously familiar with the surroundings while being unfamiliar. The familiarity is observed in the details of the curtains, acknowledging them as “Nottingham lace,” and recognizing the “maid-of-all-work”: “She saw the open windows of the sitting-room, the Nottingham lace curtains stirring and billowing in the draft, and she caught sight of Maria Macapa’s towed head as the Mexican maid-of-all-work went to and fro in the suite”

(110). She looks in at the goings on of her apartment while she is not there, but does so in the way of someone passing on the street. Because she is positioned outside of the home and looking into it as a stranger would, the text signifies that Trina feels somewhat like a foreigner. Her exterior location positions Trina as failing to identify that domestic space as her own; however, the narrator's words signify that she does recognize the space as "her home" (110). She is an observer of something that belongs to her and should be familiar to her, but she does not seem to see herself as living that life. The image of her standing in the street, looking up at her own apartment as a stranger reflects Trina's conflicted feelings with the domestic space. Trina does not maintain a wholehearted alignment with the Angel in the House, whose sphere is the absolute connection of herself to her home. Instead, Trina exists slightly outside of this domestic realm.

Trina and McTeague visit the house "between Polk Street and the great avenue one block" to find a permanent home and move out of the tenement. During their visit, Trina seems able to associate that space as a home the McTeagues could share one day. Trina is curious and fascinated with this home, but she only observes it from the outside. The McTeagues' desire to own a home is apparent, especially when the couple visits the home almost every Sunday:

They stood for fully half an hour upon the other side of the street, examining every detail of its exterior, hazarding guesses at to the arrangement of the rooms, commenting upon its immediate neighborhood—which was rather sordid. The house was a wooden two-story arrangement, built by a misguided contractor in a sort of hideous Queen Anne style, all scrolls and meaningless mill work, with a cheap imitation of stained glass in the light over the door. There was a

microscopic front yard full of dusty calla-lilies. The front door boasted an electric bell. (114)

The description of the home is only external. And, the façade of the house is similar to the McTeagues's marriage. The house is composed of wood, which while sturdy does have the risk of decaying because of weather, moisture, and termites. Just as the home has a façade of being impenetrable, beneath the surface lurk many impediments to its strength. Just as the outward appearance of the McTeagues's marriage looks solid, their relationship begins to decay almost from the beginning. Trina finds out from a neighbor the former occupants moved out because there was water found in the basement and the conditions created by the stagnant water were "absolutely unhealthy" (116). In addition to the hazards, the over-the-top "mill work," "imitation" stained glass, "electric bell" are characteristic of the falsities present in the McTeagues. The millwork looks ornate, but does not add value to the home. The electric bell is a luxury, but seemingly frivolous on a run-down house in a sordid neighborhood. The imitation stained glass is a piece of art, like Trina's carved animals. The stained glass is not authentic, just as Trina's animals are not "made in France." Similarly, the giant tooth outside McTeague's dental office represents extravagance and wealth, but the couple is not wealthy because of Trina's miserliness. The superficial extravagances of the house, as well as McTeague's gaudy display of success, are cheap imitations of their frivolousness.

Instead of investing in a substantial home, Trina would rather hoard money. From nearly the beginning of their marriage, Trina's passion is not for McTeague, but adding money to her "little store," which digresses into an obsession that takes away "little animal comforts." As Trina's passion about collecting money becomes stronger, filling

her with “oscillating feelings” of either being “unhappy” when she had to spend the money or “delight[ed]” when she could add to her hoard, McTeague’s passion for his wife dwindles: “McTeague, on his part, never asked himself now-a-days whether he loved Trina the wife as much as he had loved Trina the young girl [...] There was no passion in the dentist’s regard for his wife” (108). Although the couple seems as content as they have ever been at this point in their marriage, both are drifting apart. The latent instincts that exist within both of the McTeagues have started to surface in Trina’s “niggardliness” and McTeague’s “brut[ish]” behavior. The breaking point occurs after McTeague is no longer allowed to practice dentistry. Trina’s miserliness and McTeague’s violence corrupt them. Their living spaces reflect their degradation with each being more filthy and repellent than the last.

In spite of their financial security, Trina convinces McTeague they must move to an even more modest home because of their reduced income and her unwillingness to touch the principle of her lottery winnings. The couple stays in the same tenement the photographer’s suite is in, but moves into a more meager space. Although the apartment is situated at the highest level of the building, which would seem more prestigious, the view from the top is less than ideal. Even though the two are at the highest physical point they have ever been in any of their homes, they are relegated to looking at the “alley,” “rooftops,” and “dirty yard.” Contrarily, the bay window of their previous apartment looking down over Polk Street gave Trina a view of the hustle and bustle of the city: “All day long Trina sat in the bay window of the sitting-room that commanded a view of a small section of Polk Street. As often as she raised her head she could see the big market, a confectionery store, a bell-hanger’s shop, and, farther on, above the roofs, the glass

skylights and water tanks of the big public baths” (104). The photographer’s suite on the second floor where the two lived previously still commanded a “small” view of Polk Street, unlike the only window of the third floor apartment overlooking the back alley of the building. This view from their apartment is conducive with their denigrated state. No longer do they have an abbreviated view like they did from the bay window of the photographer’s suite, they can only look down upon the alley and the dirty back yard.

The two move into this smaller apartment and sell nearly all of their belongings, but the space is still cramped and untidy. Trina attempts to persuade McTeague to sell everything because she was prepared to do so. But, McTeague keeps his concertina, the canary in the gilt cage, and the gold tooth, even after “the Other Dentist” comes to the apartment asking about the tooth’s price. Don Graham discusses the contrast between Trina and McTeague: “Trina will sell anything. McTeague will not. His attachment to aesthetic objects testifies to a humanity that his wife lacks [...] Their limited artistic activities illustrate the same point. McTeague plays on his concertina for pleasure and self-expression. Trina easily gives up her melodeon and carves her wooden animals only for money” (318). Whereas McTeague plays the concertina “for pleasure and self-expression,” Trina only creates in order to make more money for her hoard. She keeps the Noah’s Ark animals as a hobby, Graham argues, only because it brings money, not for artistic expression. Trina’s obsession with speedily creating the Noah’s ark animals is apparent in her careless paint smudges around their small apartment.

Trina diligently kept the three-room apartment the two once shared clean and tidy, but as the home transforms into a factory for monetary gain, she abandons the domestic chores. Creating the Noah’s Ark animals consumes Trina’s days. She is no longer

concerned with keeping up the house or making a pleasant home: “The room itself was not gay [...] Streaks and spots of the ‘non-poisonous’ paint that Trina used were upon the walls and wood-work” (160). Instead, the room reflects a feeling of confinement and unkemptness. Their relationship also begins to suffocate in this smaller, den-like space. Ironically, as the two physically move higher in the building, their debasement of one another and of themselves increases. Trina no longer cares about her appearance as she once did in the photographer’s studio; similarly, McTeague loses his drive to find a new job and spends his days smoking his pipe and wandering Polk Street.

Trina’s affection for her money over her husband’s “little animal comforts” begins after McTeague loses his dental practice (158). McTeague recalls the time when Trina allowed these comforts: “the old prosperous times” (158). Trina once encouraged in her husband an appreciation for his “silk hat and ‘Prince Albert’ coat,” “‘Yale mixture’ in his pipe,” and “clean cuffs” (158-9). Trina pampered him with little luxuries when they were first married, but now her devotion is to collecting her money. McTeague reminisces over “cabbage soups and steaming chocolate,” “Sunday afternoon walks,” and “bottled beer” (158). He did not indulge in any of these things before Trina. She developed in him a taste for small indulgences that are forbidden now because that means less money in her little store. But, the ultimate refusal of comfort comes on the day McTeague is fired from his job with a surgical instruments manufacturer. He comes home early and Trina turns him out immediately to look for another job, refusing him cab fare, and insisting he walk in the rain. Even though McTeague has just been let go, Trina insists he leave immediately to find another job, but not before shaking him down for every nickel in his pockets. As soon as he leaves, she rushes to her trunk to add to her

“chamois-skin bag” the coins she got from a reluctant McTeague. Trina does not care that her husband is traipsing all over San Francisco in the cold rain looking for work; she cares only for her hoard.

Even though the two were crowded in the small one-room flat, Trina resolves to find something more affordable. After Zerkow kills Maria Macapa, Trina notices a “rooms-to-let” sign on the tenement building. Just as the bankrupt photographer’s studio indicated their morally bankrupt status, the couple moving into the apartment where Maria was killed is telling of Trina’s impending death at the hands of McTeague. Trina is becoming a version of Maria, just as the McTeagues became a version of the bankrupt photographer. Again, the apartment reflects the fate of Trina and McTeague. The narrator describes the room as “abominably dirty” (185); the same word is used in describing Trina’s horrific death.

In spite of McTeague’s protest about moving into “that dirty house,” the McTeagues move into the apartment “with its grisly memories; the one window looking out into a grimy maze of back yards and broken sheds, was what they now knew as their home” (184). The narrator describes Trina and McTeague as sinking “rapidly lower and lower” once in their shared third home (184). The two live like animals in filth and squalor. The apartment is described as “reeking with odors” and “evil-smelling” (185). As if the dirty streets around them are drawn to their revolting apartment, the narrator says, “All the filth of the alley invaded their quarters like a rising muddy tide” (185). The disgusting nature of the couple’s home is more than McTeague can bear, and shortly after moving into the apartment he takes all of Trina’s hoarded gold coins and leaves her.

In the wake of devastating medical news that some of her fingers must be

amputated and McTeague abandoning her, Trina moves to another room on Polk Street but in “a much poorer and more sordid quarter” (193). She finds a “little room over the kindergarten schoolroom” to rent. The natural surroundings of the building are described positively and has “a sunny little court.” The pleasant landscape outside Trina’s window lends a charming air to the room she now lives in alone. Even in nature, Trina sees her obsession: “The window of Trina’s room and filter[ed] the sunlight so that it fell in round golden spots upon the floor of the room. ‘Like gold pieces,’ Trina said to herself” (193). Trina’s mania for her gold coins is now present in everything she sees. Even, the beauty of a simple shadow reflecting light into her room is assigned a monetary value. Although the room is more pleasant than the two previous apartments she shared with McTeague, Trina’s obsession has reached new lows and permeates not only her thoughts, but also her perceptions.

Now that she is free from all other distractions, Trina’s life is consumed with saving. In spite of being free from McTeague’s abuse, Trina is isolated. She no longer has her family around her like she did before she and McTeague married; she alienated them when they were financially struggling by refusing to send her mother money. The friendships she once had with the residents of the Polk Street tenement have also fallen away. Trina must battle blood poisoning and the amputation of her fingers alone after McTeague robs and abandons her: “She found herself [...] alone with her five thousand dollars. The interest of this would support her, and yet allow her to save a little” (193). Trina is lonely, but not because she is mourning her failed relationship with McTeague. Instead, Trina frets over the absence of her savings like one would expect her to agonize over the loss of her husband: “Her avarice had grown to be her one dominant passion; her

love of money for the money's sake brooded in her heart, driving out by degrees every other natural affection" (194). Her "passion" is no longer associated with her husband, but with her need to accumulate more money. The "natural affection" Trina once had for her husband is replaced by another lover: the unnatural love of her gold coins.

Whereas Trina once collected money because she had an urge to create stability in her life, her savings eventually take the place of her desire for her husband. The sexual connection Trina has with her gold coins is apparent long before McTeague leaves her. When the narrator portrays how she interacts with the coins when she knows "McTeague was far from home" (170) is described similarly to the way in which a secret love affair would transpire. Trina's sexual arousal over the touching the coins and putting them inside her mouth echoes an orgasmic experience toward her money: "She would draw the heap lovingly toward her and bury her face in it [...] put the smaller gold pieces in her mouth, and jingled them there [...] with little murmurs of affection [...] eyes half closed [...] her breath coming in long sighs" (170). Trina's lustful desire for her coins is realized in this scene while the two are living in their second apartment together. Not until McTeague has left her and Trina is alone does she use the coins as a makeshift lover. The coins transform from fixation to a replacement lover, which is telling of Trina's diminished mental state.

Once Trina lives in the room above the kindergarten, her "passion" is her money. The gold coins "exclud[e] every other sentiment" in Trina (197). She no longer misses her family and friends; she no longer misses McTeague. Trina has the one thing she can rely on to bring her joy, her gold coins. Trina transfixes on the accumulation of money to a level that exceeds any other point in Norris's text, and her sexual deviancy awakens.

She places the coins on her bed, takes off her clothes, and sleeps on them. The text describes her as taking “a strange ecstatic pleasure in the touch of the smooth flat pieces the length of her entire body” (198). Her sexual passions are now wrapped up in her money: the only thing she has and the only thing that bring her pleasure. William E. Cain discusses Trina’s sexual connection to her money as a perversion, one that adds to her titillation for domestic violence. “Trina’s reduction of all the passions to her craving for money, as she luridly fantasizes that the gold acts as a caressing lover” (340). Trina does not bemoan the loss of her husband and her fingers as much as she does the savings McTeague stole from her before he left. Trina’s romantic partnership is now with her coins instead of McTeague.

Though Trina could live on the interest from her lottery winnings and working as a scrub-woman, that is not enough. She is driven to replenish the four hundred dollars McTeague took from her. Trina could in fact survive, albeit meagerly, on just her cleaning job and the dividends from her winnings. But, Trina is not content to be without her trunk filled with gold coins. Her desperation to replace what was taken from her is now the center of her life. The home she lives in becomes merely a shelter, sometimes lacking necessities, in order to restore her savings: “Finally she sold her wedding dress, that had hitherto lain in the bottom of her trunk [...] But for all that the match-box and the bag refused to fill up; after three weeks of the most rigid economy they contained but eighteen dollars and some small change” (195). Trina is willing to suffer without necessary items such as electricity to increase her savings minimally. She even sells the final remnant of any material reminder of her marriage to McTeague: her wedding dress. Although Trina works hard, sells her possessions, and does without essentials, she is

unable to replenish the monetary worth that once brought her pleasure in saving. Trina saves and by doing so desperately attempts to fill an empty space that follows her wherever she goes.

Finally, Trina suffers the ultimate form of loss the night McTeague comes to her house, robs her, and takes her life. After beating her unconscious and bloody, McTeague breaks into her trunk. He “grop[es]” under the clothes Trina has in the trunk, searching for her money (206). This action reflects the same sexual undertones from the scene when McTeague fondled the clothes in Trina’s closet. The difference in McTeague molesting the clothes he sees as an incarnation of Trina and McTeague cracking open Trina’s trunk is the violent nature the latter act entails. Cavalier discusses Trina’s death noting the use of words such as “groping” and “thrust” as similar to an act of sexual violence: “McTeague’s rough handling of Trina’s trunk and its contents is akin to raping Trina symbolically a final time” (139). McTeague’s forcefulness with Trina’s trunk is comparable to a violation of her body. Her trunk, the space that houses her only motivation for living, echoes his anger and resentment of Trina loving the money more than she loves him. McTeague fills his pockets to bursting with Trina’s gold coins and carries the sack full of “twenty-dollar gold pieces” out with him (206). As he makes off with Trina’s hoard, she lies on the floor unconscious and truly alone. Her husband is gone, her gold coins are gone, and her life slips away as she drowns in her own blood.

Trina suffers loss from the time she meets McTeague until the night he takes her life. Trina has emotional and social roots in the idea of the Angel in the House; this is apparent when she and McTeague are first married. But once she believes she will have to be fully relied upon to provide for her family, a clear example of New Woman role,

Trina suffers a disconnection from her domestic space, as well as her husband. Instead, she clings to the only thing she sees as solidifying her worth—her hoard of gold coins. In examining her as a woman torn between two feminine ideals, her obsession with holding on to what can bring her tangible value—her savings—is more clearly understood.

The space where Trina exists, somewhere between the Angel in the House and the New Woman, separates her from the relationships and tasks that seemed once to fulfill her; instead, she chooses to accumulate money, which destroys her faculties, ruins her relationships, and indirectly costs Trina her life. In an attempt to gain something that she has lost, Trina ultimately loses everything. Thus, Norris's text can be read as a warning about societal tensions and the hazards of the flux of ideological changes in gender, which lead to the perversion of identity and agency for women. Trina's displacement illustrates her failure to identify with these socially-constructed gender ideals while also grappling with the various losses she experiences during her courtship and marriage to McTeague.

NOTES

- ^{1.} Lyrics taken from Pink Floyd's "Empty Spaces."
- ^{2.} Quotation taken from Robert D. Lundy's dissertation "The Making of *McTeague* and *The Octopus*." Excerpt published in Donald Pizer's critical edition of *McTeague* as "The Polk Street Background of *McTeague*."
- ^{3.} John D. Barry's review in *Literary World* dated March 18, 1899.
- ^{4.} Critics' harshest reactions concerned the violent, gruesome aspects of the novel. In *Overland Monthly*, Milne Levick criticizes the text stating, "the impression the book leaves is far from pleasant." And the *Dallas Morning News* wrote about *McTeague* as "a strong book of a very unpleasant kind" and "almost as disagreeable as a story." Others posited that *McTeague*'s subject matter was "grotesque," "brutal" and "loathsome." In spite of the negative literary reviews, modern film critics note director Erich von Stroheim's 1924 adaptation *Greed* as one of the "greatest [films] ever made" (Malcolm). Derek Malcolm praised the film because it tells the story of "the dehumanising influence of money, the realism, detail and complex characterisation of which made it unforgettable." Mary Lawlor discusses von Stroheim's intention of producing *McTeague* exactly as it was written, attempting a replica of Norris's words. His dedication to precision earned von Stroheim credit for the longest film ever made. The film's original "forty-two to forty-five" reels and over nine hour screening time attest to his thoroughness: "What von Stroheim produced in *Greed* was a very lengthy, visual translation, in effect a cinema-novel whose working script attempted a page-for-page transcription of *McTeague*" (391-2). Due to the extreme length of the film—six hundred minutes in total—the production company eventually cut it down to a mere ten reels.

Although Norris's text and von Stroheim's film received varying reviews, the common ground the two art forms share are how *McTeague* and *Greed* both manage to tell stories of descent with Naturalistic roots.

^{5.} Edward and Madeline Vaughn Abbott's review in *Literary World* dated April 1, 1899.

^{6.} Elizabeth Flock of *The Washington Post* published "Queen Victoria Was the First to Get Married in White" on April 29, 2011. Ten years following Queen Victoria's wedding to Prince Albert, *Godey's Lady's Books* printed: "Custom has decided, from the earliest ages, that white is the most fitting hue, whatever may be the material. It is an emblem of the purity and innocence of girlhood, and the unsullied heart she now yields to the chosen one." The monthlies stance as firmly reflecting Victorian ideals, such as the Angel in the House, cements their perspective in this declaration regarding Victoria's choice of wedding attire.

^{7.} The articles from the *San Francisco Examiner*, October 10 and October 14, 1893, are contained in Pizer's critical edition of *McTeague*. The real-life homicide of Sarah Collins at the hands of her husband is the basis for the horrific torture and murder of Trina. Similarly, Trina suffers at the hands of McTeague after he breaks into her apartment, beats her to death, and, finally, steals the money from her trunk. *San Francisco Examiner* describes Collins as "a young man in his early thirties, healthy and muscular [...] The face is not degraded, but brutish [...] one who was made an animal by his nature to start with. The jaw is heavy and cruel [...] devoid of intelligence." The description of Collins certainly reflects McTeague's physical and intellectual characteristics as a burly brute. McTeague is often characterized as being animal-like and savagely violent, especially

when alcohol is involved: “Every other Sunday he became an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol” (5) and “What animal cunning, what brute instinct clamored for recognition and obedience?” (215). The marked similarities between Collins and McTeague are contained in their physical and psychological descriptions. Both suffer punishment for their crimes, but McTeague’s penance has a Naturalistic twist.

Trina’s murder does not allow McTeague a formal and legal punishment, such as Collins received. Instead, when the novel ends, McTeague is shackled to the dead Marcus Schouler and left to die in the desert in Death Valley. Contrarily, Collins was convicted and charged for stabbing “twenty-nine fatal wounds” into his wife, “the janitress of the school” (Pizer 249-50). The autopsy report describes Sarah’s injuries as “gashes in her breast, in her throat, on her head and her face” (Pizer 252). Sarah’s atrocious demise also took place in the primary school where she was employed: “The walls were splashed with blood and the floors were covered with it [...] The red stain extended out into the hall and down the steps to the street, but the teachers of the kindergarten had the dreadful traces cleaned away before the children got there” (qtd. in Pizer 252). Like Sarah, Trina is left to die in a coat closet in the school where she worked as a scrub woman. Both Trina and Sarah suffer similar deadly beatings at the hands of their husbands, who seek to take their money and then also savagely take their lives from them.

⁸ Quote taken from Ouida’s “The New Woman” published in *North American Review* in May 1894.

⁹ Rich specifically references “The Prologue” to the collection, *The Complete Works of Anne Bradstreet*, compiled in 1981. Bradstreet establishes her opposition to those who refused to accept her as a poet:

"I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits'
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance."

Even in the mid-seventeenth century, Bradstreet took a progressive stance against domestic activities being the only role for women. Her poem expresses her defiant attitude against those who will not believe her work genuine because it came from a female's pen.

^{10.} Dora L. Costa's article "From Mill Town to Board Room: The Rise of Women's Paid Labor" provides a 100-year history of women in the American workforce, as well as in other industrialized countries.

^{11.} Rich's *Transgression and Convention: The New Woman and the Fiction of Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* explores the relationship between the societal changes towards the New Woman and its evolution in woman's literature around the turn of the twentieth century. Rich states, "The New Woman, in her most stereotypical sense, was indeed a classist phenomenon, for poorer women had long been working outside the home, albeit in limited, low-paying jobs" (lv). The New Woman figure was typically an upper class, white woman, but began to include middle class women. Evidence of the term's elasticity develops through time as the middle class makes a stronger presence in American economic culture.

^{12.} Rich's text quotes "an anonymous editorial" originally published in the *Herald*

following a Woman's Rights Convention in Syracuse, New York in 1852 (12). The piece damns the women, as well as the men, present at this convention, accusing them of going against their gendered roles and describing them in terms of gender confusion, such as: "mannish women" and "hen-pecked husbands" (12). The most overt condemnation is found in a statement reflecting gender discrimination as an innate part of human existence. The writer of this editorial assumes a patriarchal perspective that assumes women are inferior to men through a natural or biological construct, not a social one.

^{13.} Although the details of Trina's brutal death were edited from the published version of Norris's text, Donald Pizer's edition contains what remained of the omitted scene. Pizer notes the deleted pages are now missing from the manuscript and what can still be found of them is made available in his addition from contributors Jesse S. Crisler's dissertation "A Critical and Textual Study of Frank Norris's *McTeague*" and Charles E. Kern II.

^{14.} Maria approaches Trina and Marcus to buy a lottery ticket from her in McTeague's office. Even though Marcus attempts to get Maria to leave them alone and reminds Trina of the illegality of the lottery, Trina purchases a one-dollar ticket anyway (16). According to Richard Dunstan in *Gambling in California*, gambling was examined at the beginning of the nineteenth century on "moral grounds" that were "largely based on religious beliefs." Dunstan notes the disrepute of lotteries, which were almost exclusively federally funded during this time, was due to the fact that the opposition group felt lower class individuals were exploited by lotteries. Almost all states had banned lotteries by 1840, only a mere two decades shy of the congressionally funded District of Columbia "beautification" project in 1823. Although California was a booming gambling state

during the nineteenth century with, as Dunstan cites, “patrons includ[ing] women, blacks, and Chinese,” by 1856 the lottery fell under intense scrutiny. By 1891, Dunstan concludes, “the statutes made the penalty for playing equal to the penalty for running the game.” By the time Trina would have purchased her ticket in the text, the stakes would have been high and the punishment severe for participation in the lottery.

^{15.} Match safes were also called vesta boxes and were carried by all classes to house matches in order to keep them dry. Upper-class people carried gold or silver match safes, while middle to lower classes utilized tin or brass versions. Ironically, Trina’s class standing shows in spite of the contents of her match safe. Her match safe may be filled to overflowing with gold coins, but it is still brass—giving away her lower class status.

^{16.} Valerie Cumming, C.W. Cunnington and P.E. Cunnington’s *The Dictionary of Fashion History* also cites an article explaining the usage and discretion in utilizing a “bosom friend”: “The fashionable belles have provided themselves with *bosom friends* for the winter. Their province is to protect that delicate region from assault of every kind; and they may be held at all the furriers shops in town. A modern lady, with her feet in a *fur-basket*, and her *bosom-friend*, is as impregnable as the Rock of Gibraltar” (*Norfolk Chronicle*). These decorative pieces of fabric served as a modesty tool for the décolletage.

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